

[Welcome to Newsletter Five - Updated 12th August, 2005.](#)

"We can do no great things..... only small things with great love."

Mother Teresa

Hello again, everyone!

I hope you are all happy and healthy. I can't believe how quickly time is going..... before I know it I will be heading back to Australia to visit everyone (in November). Life is chugging along nicely here and, as usual, I've been rather busy.

First of all, I'd like to tell you about an old man who comes to my guest house to beg (I mentioned him briefly in one of my earlier newsletters.) There is no social security network of any kind here in Cambodia, hence, beggars are a very common sight. The old man who comes to our guesthouse only comes a few times a week and he is so old and frail that he shuffles up to the entrance using a walking stick, pauses for a while with his hat out, then he has to do a sort of three point turn in order to turn himself around and head back out to the street.

I often thought about him and wondered what his life was like so I decided, with the help of a Cambodian friend, Mr Bee, to find out. Next time he came I had Mr Bee ask him his name and where he lived and would he mind if we came to visit some time. His name is Mr Rein and when asked where he lived he gave us the name of a pagoda, so we assumed he lived with the monks. (Often the monks take in orphans and old people who have nowhere else to go.) He also said that he had no family. So a couple of days later Mr Bee and I set off to find him. We went to the pagoda he mentioned but they didn't know of him and said that he probably lived in the nearby slum area. We headed off to the slum area, which is a dreadfully awful place. It consists, as I suppose most slums do, of many, many families living in tiny little shanties, made out of whatever people can find. The lanes between them are narrow and filled with stagnant water and filth. Its crowded, and there are people are everywhere. All in all its a horrible place. Mr Bee asked around and we soon discovered that Mr Rein did indeed live there and someone went to find him to let him know he had visitors.



It turns out that Mr Rein told a little white lie about having no family. I suppose I can understand why though and don't hold it against him. His only way of getting money is to beg, so if people think he's all alone then perhaps they will be more inclined to help him with some money. Mr Rein is 72 and he actually has a wife, two boys and, Mr Bee said, a two year old girl. I looked incredulously at Mr Bee and said "are you trying to tell me that this frail old man fathered a child two years ago!" Well, it turns out that the little girl is in fact only about six months old and an orphan. Her mother died of aids and there was no-one to take care of her so Mr Rein and his wife took her in. Mr Rein's wife is only 44 (the poor thing) and works very hard doing laundry. Washing machines are rare in Cambodia and people pay to have their washing done by hand. Its very hard work and Mrs Rein probably makes less than a dollar a day. I was so touched that they had taken in the little baby and was pleased to see that despite the rough living conditions they reside in the little baby looked amazingly well cared for. She was clean and was wearing clean clothes - a very rare sight in these conditions. And the love that not only Mr and Mrs Rein, but also the boys, showed toward the baby was obvious. Apparently, they have had her checked out and don't think that she has aids. Her only problem is that due to the fact that she was neglected for the first few months of her life and she was always laying down, the back of her head is completely flat.

Its hard to know how to help people improve their quality of life in a sustainable way in these conditions so, so far we have been giving them practical help. We have bought baby formula (which is very expensive here), clothes, rice, bedding, etc, for them. Tomorrow I intend to visit them again and take more supplies including school books, etc, for the boys, as school is about to resume after a month long vacation.

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, I have been doing a bit of photography work. I don't get a lot of work, but I get enough to keep a roof over my head and still have the freedom to do my "aid" work (which is just how I like it).



The work I have been getting has been very interesting and lots of fun. I was fortunate to meet an Australian photographer called Darren who has been living and work here for over ten years. He has built up a very good business, called Ocelus, and has a Cambodian man, Hoknym, that manages it for him. As well as doing photography Darren now also makes television commercials and because he's been here for a long time he works with all the big advertising agencies and is very busy. So that's where I come in. When Darren can't do a particular job, Hoknym calls me up. Some of the work I've been doing involves studio photography which initially took me out of my comfort zone, but as Darren has a fully equipped studio and Hoknym always supplies me with an assistant who knows his way around the studio, I've managed fine.

The first job I had to shoot was for a Thai company that makes soy milk. It was a rather nice job, I must say! It was a studio shoot and involved a very muscular model, minus his shirt, gleefully drinking the soy milk. I have to admit I didn't find that job too hard! I'd include some photos from these jobs but there's probably copyright issues so I better not. The model always turns up with a makeup person, art director and assistant art director, etc, from the ad agency and they are a really fun bunch of people so we have a lot of laughs. Half way through this particular shoot we got a phone call for the soy milk company saying they had just flown in to Phnom Penh and were on their way to the studio to supervise the shoot! That stressed us all out a bit.

Another job I've done for the same ad agency and which will be a regular monthly gig was for Lux. They are really big here and have quite an extensive product line. Most beauty products here contain whitening agents as all Cambodian women want to be whiter. They always admire our pale skin. Actually, I've had people admire the largeness of my nose (which I hate), and people often stop me to admire my hairy arms, even going so far as to stroke them! The Lux job involves photographing the monthly winner of a contest that Lux runs. Again the girl is always attractive, has a hair and makeup artist to style her and wears beautiful clothes, so its not hard to get good photos.



I've also had a job with another ad agency which was for one of the phone companies here. They wanted to do a whole range of shots of a group of trendy looking young people on a camping expedition. The odd thing is that nobody goes camping in Cambodia. We set off well before the crack of dawn, myself, an assistant, four models and some of their mothers, the ad agency and makeup people and headed out to a waterfall about 100 km's away. It was a very beautiful location and to get to the actual waterfall we had to first of all travel along a track on carts pulled by cows, then we had to hike a couple of kilometers. It was well worth it to see some of Cambodia's natural beauty. The models were all great and I was happy with all the shots I was getting. After lunch we set off for a second location to do the actual campsite shots. The only problem was that it started to rain and continued to do so for most of the afternoon, so it became a little more challenging. As we had come so far and due to the costs of hiring the models again, etc, it was decided to go ahead and take the photos as best we could despite the rain. Fortunately everybody was happy with the finished result.

On Tuesday of this week I have another job for another phone company which should be quite simple. All they want is one shot of a grandfather, father and son, all sitting on a sofa looking happy. The only tricky part is that they want the sofa to be positioned in front of a bright window. The problem with that is finding a window that doesn't have ugly security bars on it (which they almost all do). Then later in the week I think I have a job for ANZ Bank (believe it or not). They have just opened up here in Cambodia and this week is the official launch. Hagar (the NGO that works with poor women and children) have also approached me again about going out to the provinces for two days to photograph their regional projects. I was hoping they'd ask me, as, apart from the fact that it will be very interesting, I also want to get some ideas on what they do to help the poor villages.



Some of my friends. The children are playing in the rice fields which are an incredibly vibrant green colour.

Stay tuned for the next newsletter in which I will tell you about what's been happening out at Prasat Char and about a little boy called Nyut as well as my adventures at the Land Mine Museum.

Take care and love to you all,

Deborah